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Private Confederacies: The Emotional World of Southern Men as Citizens and Soldiers

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Review

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Broomall, James J. *Private Confederacies: The Emotional World of Southern Men as Citizens and Soldiers*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019. HARCOVER. \$90.00
ISBN: 978-1469651989 pp. 240.

Since the publication of Bertram Wyatt-Brown's groundbreaking work, *Southern Honor*, it has become something of a cliché to describe white southern males as honor-bound and independent. Antebellum southern men were analyzed almost exclusively through this prism as a way to make sense of their public personas and the communities that supported their rash, aggressive actions. Historians have thankfully begun rendering the interior and public lives of southern men as something more than the sum of their outward appearances. Although it is true that honor and its accoutrements did shape the manliness of some southerners, historians have uncovered other modes of projecting masculinity that complicates the independence and drive for mastery that supposedly motivated southern men. Into this conversation comes James Broomall's fine book, *Private Confederacies*. As the title suggests, Broomall is most concerned with the interior thoughtways of Confederate men and their emotional development over time.

A close examination of written materials, namely diaries and letters, gives Broomall a keen insight into the pre-war mindsets of southern men. He argues that these men "suffered from self-doubt, agonized over an unknowable future, and approached manhood with a degree of trepidation" (31). Through six thematic chapters, Broomall weaves together a convincing and insightful analysis of southern men in wartime. This study relies upon the heavy lifting he does in the first chapter, which contextualizes the words men wrote about themselves in their letters and diaries. Looking at categories like self-improvement, relationships, and hunting, he makes use of recent historiography to place antebellum men within alternate strains of manhood, like the "masculine achiever" who embraced the typically bourgeoisie values of industry and perseverance, or "intellectual manhood," that scholars had previously argued only took root in the north

(19). Of course these readings are perhaps skewed because his sources—namely diaries and letters—limits his findings to a certain class of southerner, one that had access to education, opportunity, and different ethics than those of the typical planter elite.

Upon entering the Confederate Army, men who had once prized independence soon found that they had become completely dependent upon the government for uniforms, rations, and materiel. Whereas the typical soldier might have felt constrained by his new systematized and disciplined world, it would have been interesting if Broomall had been able to take into account the quartermasters who did the organizing and supplying. Did they also chafe at their constraints like other soldiers, or did they find that their version of manhood meshed well with their new profession? In this constrained, often cramped world of camp life, that southern men had to form emotional, even “imagined” communities, that allowed southern soldiers to relinquish their manly independence for the good of their unit and the cause. The “informal support networks,” Broomall contends, “significantly underpinned why men chose to stay and fight, or fled the field” (54). Although military discipline and the experience of combat did reconfigure white southern manhood, the destruction of slavery forced it to transform. Because southern men could no longer exert mastery over the enslaved, the underpinnings of the southern honor culture had become unsteady. The rise of the KKK, he shows, had larger ramifications than just the restoration of Democratic rule. The tactics of extralegal violence practiced by nightriders “engaged broader cultural messages about race, gender, and civilization” that imbued their actions with meaning (151).

Where Broomall falls short in fleshing out southern masculinity in the Civil War Era is to demonstrate how those other personae, the ones he took time to explain in the first chapter, weathered the events of the war. Did the middle class succumb to “savage masculinity” or did the middle-class strivers become Scalawags? If that was the case, do these different modes of manhood stand in for deeper-rooted political differences between white men in the South? Or did he overstate his case about different modes of southern manhood only to find that honor culture was indeed hegemonic? By focusing so much on the violent aspects of postwar southern masculinity, Broomall seems to suggest the latter. Hopefully Broomall will continue investigating the important legacies the war had on Southern whites to uncover some of the contradictions of southern masculinity.

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